AN ADDRESS TO Proteſtant Diſſenters,

On the SUBJECT of giving the

LORD's SUPPER TO CHILDREN.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L. L. D. F. R. S.

Train up a Child in the Way he ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. SOLOMON.

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AN

ADDRESS, &c.

MY CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE ſubject of this Addreſs was almoſt as new to myſelf, as it can be to any of you, at the time that I publiſhed my *Addreſs* to you on the ſubject of the Lord's Supper in general. I cannot ſay that I had not heard of the queſtion, but I had given no particular attention to it. But having, ſince that time, been more converſant with the antient chriſtian writers, uſually called *Fathers*, and eſpecially having met with Dr. *Peirce*'s *Eſſay* on the ſubject, I am now, upon mature conſideration, fully ſatisfied, that *infant communion*, as well as *infant baptiſm*, was

the moſt antient cuſtom in the chriſtian church; and therefore that the practice is of apoſtolical, and conſequently of divine authority.

I am well aware of the prejudice with which any thing that can be ſaid on this ſubject will be generally received by perſons who have been conſtantly uſed to the contrary practice, and who have never ſo much as heard of any other; but this obſtacle lies in the way of every reformation, when the corruption of any opinion or rite in the chriſtian church has been long eſtabliſhed. It was the caſe with the firſt reformers from Popery. They diſcovered but a part of the papal corruptions, though ſome of the moſt glaring of them; but the providence of God has been gradually opening the eyes of the chriſtian world to many others, of which they took no notice; and ſuch, I believe, is the caſe with this.

Think

Think not, however, that, though the propoſal of giving the euchariſt to children be new to many of you who read this Addreſs, it is therefore a ſubject that has never been ſtarted before. The practice has been largely and ably defended by the learned Dr. Peirce, of Exeter (who greatly diſtinguiſhed himſelf both by his writings and ſufferings in the cauſe of truth) in a treatiſe which was publiſhed after his death, in the year 1728; and to which no anſwer, that I have heard of, has yet been made. This treatiſe I think is abundantly ſufficient to ſatisfy any candid and impartial enquirer; and I pretend not, in this addreſs, to do much more than to bring into one view, and into a ſhorter compaſs, the moſt important of his arguments, in order to revive ſome degree of attention to the ſubject. While I do this, laying before you the evidence of what appears to me to be a truly antient and apoſtolical practice, I flatter myſelf that you will hear me with due attention and candour.

I am

I am far from pretending that any thing which relates to a mere *external* ſervice, is of primary importance in chriſtianity. Nothing can be ſaid to be of primary importance but the doctrines concerning God, our moral duty, and a future ſtate; becauſe theſe have the greateſt influence on men's hearts and lives, and fit them for a happy immortality after death. But, notwithſtanding this, every *divine command* ought certainly to be implicitly complied with, even though we ſhould not be able to diſcover the reaſon of it. I hope, however, to make it appear, that this practice has ſeveral, and even obvious uſes, as well as the authority of an antient apoſtolical practice, to recommend it.

In my addreſs to you upon this ſubject, I ſhall firſt endeavour to ſhow, that we have ſufficient reaſon to believe, that giving the euchariſt to children was an antient, and even an apoſtolical practice. I ſhall then trace the hiſtory of this cuſtom, and the manner in which it went

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out of uſe in the church of Rome (for it was never diſuſed in any other chriſtian church) and, in the laſt place, I ſhall endeavour to recommend this practice, from the conſideration of the advantages that may probably be derived from it.

That little ſhould be ſaid in the way of *poſitive precept*, either about the baptiſm, or the communion of infants, by the apoſtles, and other primitive writers, cannot be wondered at, when we conſider that they were *Jews*, and therefore took for granted all the general maxims of the Jewiſh religion, unleſs they were expreſsly countermanded by the authority of Chriſt. Now, it was a fundamental maxim in the Jewiſh religion, that children were capable of full communion in it; and, indeed, there is hardly any kind of religious ſervice mentioned in the Old Teſtament, in which there is not expreſs mention of children bearing a part in it, if they were naturally capable of it. There would be nothing,

nothing, therefore, in the chriſtian ſyſtem, that could be applied to children, which the apoſtles would not, of courſe, have admitted them to, unleſs they had been expreſsly forbidden.

Thus, as it had been the univerſal cuſtom, that, when a maſter of a family was converted to the Jewiſh religion, he ſhould not only be circumciſed himſelf, but alſo circumciſe his children, and even his ſlaves, the primitive chriſtians would, of courſe, unleſs they had had ſome expreſs order to the contrary, conclude, and direct, that when a maſter of a family was converted to the chriſtian religion, he ſhould not only be baptized himſelf, but alſo all his *houſhold*, conſiſting of his children, and all who were properly *under his power*.

Indeed, without any farther reaſoning, they could not but ſee, that a child was, naturally, as capable of being *baptized*, as of being *circumciſed*, and as capable of receiving the *Lord's Supper*, as of eating

eating the *Paſſover*. They could not but perceive, alſo, that the *uſes* of theſe ordinances have, reſpectively, a remarkable correſpondence to one another. For as circumciſion was the initiatory ordinance in the Jewiſh religion, ſo is baptiſm in the chriſtian; and as the Paſſover was inſtituted in commemoration of an event of the greateſt importance to all Jews, ſo the Lord's Supper was inſtituted in commemoration of an event of the greateſt importance to all chriſtians. Since theſe inſtitutions have ſo remarkable a correſpondence in the two religions, the Apoſtles and primitive chriſtians would never think of making any difference with reſpect to the ſubjects of them, without an expreſs order for it; and certainly no ſuch order appears.

Very particular notice, as I obſerved before, is taken of children in the Jewiſh law, and of their being preſent upon occaſion of all acts of public worſhip. Thus Moſes, when he pleaded with

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Pharoah for leave to go into the wilderneſs, to ſacrifice to the Lord, in anſwer to Pharoah's propoſal, that *the men only* ſhould go, *Ex.* x. 7. ſays, v. 9. *We will go with our young, and with our old, with our ſons, and with our daughters, for we muſt hold a feaſt unto the Lord.*

Agreeable to this, it is remarkable, that, in all chriſtian antiquity, we always find, that communion in the Lord's Supper immediately followed baptiſm. And no ſuch thing occurs, as that of any perſon having a right to one of theſe ordinances, and not to the other. Indeed no terms of diſtinction are ever mentioned but of *full communicants*, uſually called *the faithful*, *Catechumens*, or candidates for baptiſm, and *penitents*, or thoſe who had been excommunicated, and were deſirous of being re-admitted to communion with the church.

The antients had not even an idea of a right to join in the prayers of the church,

church, without a right to receive the Lord's Supper. Catechumens, penitents, and even heathens, were permitted to be preſent at the reading of the Scriptures, and alſo at the diſcourſe, or ſermon, which followed it; but when the church proceeded to the adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper, which part of the ſervice, and which only, was preceded by prayer, in which all who were preſent were conſidered as addreſſing themſelves to God, as their God and Father in Chriſt, all who could not properly join in thoſe prayers were deſired to depart.

Beſides, had there been with them, as there is with us, an interval between the time of baptizing and of receiving the Lord's Supper, the length of it could hardly have failed to have been mentioned, and expreſly defined. Otherwiſe, in a caſe of this nature, there would have been differences of opinion, and conſequently diſputes; ſome maintaining that perſons ought to come

ſooner, and others later, to this ordinance. Whereas it is remarkable, that, in all antiquity, from the time of the Apoſtles, there is no mention, either of any ſuch *deciſion*, or of any ſuch *controverſy*. The very terms of *adult* and *infant communion* do not occur; for they had no diſtinction of that kind to ſuggeſt the uſe of them.

The very *prejudices* and *miſtakes* of the antients prove that they had no idea of the Lord's Supper, that could lead them to exclude infants from it, but rather ſuch as muſt have tended to enforce their communion. Thus, it was a general opinion, which we find in Juſtin Martyr, Irenæus, and even in Ignatius, who was cotemporary with the Apoſtles, that the words of our Lord, in the 6th chapter of John, about the neceſſity of *eating his fleſh, and drinking his blood*, in order to have *life*, were to be underſtood of the Lord's Supper; and accordingly, it was their opinion, that the partaking of this ordinance

dinance made the body capable of a reſurrection to eternal life; and can it be ſuppoſed that the chriſtians of thoſe times would cut off their children from this great privilege.

So far were the primitive chriſtians from having an opinion of the neceſſity of all the communicants actually joining in the prayers which were made at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, of which, it is acknowledged, that children are incapable, that it was their cuſtom to ſend part of the elements from one church to another, to expreſs their fellowſhip and harmony. They alſo ſent of them from the place of public worſhip to the ſick, and took of them to eat in private, at their own houſes. Some of their opinions and practices, with reſpect to this rite, are certainly ſuperſtitious; but with this I have nothing to do. It is ſufficient for my purpoſe, that they clearly ſuppoſe the univerſal practice of full communion to all who

who were baptized, as the foundation for them.

The faireſt teſt that perhaps the authority of any opinion or practice was ever put to, was that which this was put to in the Pelagian controverſy, about the year 400, when Auſtin, in defence of the doctrine of *original ſin*, which he then ſtarted, alledged, that baptiſm, and communion in the Lord's Supper, are neceſſary in order to put it away. "No perſon," ſays he, "who "profeſſes himſelf a chriſtian, of the "Catholic faith, denies or doubts, that "children, without receiving the grace "of regeneration in Chriſt, and without eating his fleſh and drinking his "blood," i. e, without baptiſm and the Lord's Supper, "have not life "in them, and therefore are liable to "everlaſting puniſhment." Now, certainly, the eaſieſt, the moſt effectual, and, at the ſame time, the moſt obvious anſwer to this argument, would have been to deny the antiquity and authority of

of the cuſtom of baptizing infants, and admitting them to the Lord's Supper; but no ſuch argument was mentioned by Pelagius, or his followers. On the contrary, inſtead of diſputing the antiquity and authority of the cuſtom, they had recourſe to various other arguments, and ſome very weak ones. Among others, Pelagius made a diſtinction between the *kingdom of God*, and *eternal life*; allowing that unbaptized children had a right to the one, but not to the other.

We find, alſo, in the writings of Cyprian, who flouriſhed about the middle of the third century, that the cuſtom of giving the Euchariſt to children prevailed, and was uncontroverted in his time. He recites a hiſtory, in which it appears, that the Lord's Supper was adminiſtered to a child that could not ſpeak, without taking the leaſt notice that there was any thing particular in that circumſtance; and ſpeaking of ſome who had abandoned chriſtianity, he

he ſays, " that nothing might be want-
" ing to the meaſure of their iniquity,
" infants were carried, or led by their
" parents; and while they were little,
" loſt that which they had obtained
" preſently after they were born;" men-
tioning afterwards, *the meat and cup of the Lord*, among the things which they had loſt.

Some perſons may poſſibly wonder, that there ſhould be no ſuch expreſs mention of this practice, by any chriſtian writer, before Cyprian; but the wonder will ceaſe, if they conſider, that the writers before Cyprian are very few, and the occaſions of their writing ſuch as could not, with propriety, have led them to ſpeak of it.

This agrees with the notion of its having been the univerſal practice from the beginning of chriſtianity, but by no means with the idea of its having been introduced within that period. Thus in early writers we meet with no exhor-

exhortations to *frequent communion*, because it was univerſally frequent; but when the idea of the great importance, and peculiar ſanctity of this ordinance took place, and with it that of the great hazard of receiving unworthily, which reſtrained great numbers from communicating ſo often as they had done, ſuch exhortations begin to be very common, as in the writings of Chryſoſtom and others.

It ſhould be conſidered, alſo, that there is no expreſs mention made of *infant baptiſm* before this of *infant communion*; and that the mention of them both is alike accidental. Had it not been for the circumſtance which led Cyprian to mention them, and the conceit of one Fidus, who contended for deferring baptiſm till the eighth day, in conformity to the Jewiſh time of circumciſion, it is probable that there would not have been any mention of either of theſe cuſtoms till the fifth century; and for the mention of them at

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that time we are indebted to the Pelagian controverſy.

It is likewiſe not improper to obſerve, that there is no mention made of infant communion, from the time of Cyprian to that of Pope Innocent, though it is allowed by all to have been univerſally practiſed in that period; and the interval between Cyprian and Innocent is about the ſame as that which intervened between Cyprian and John, the laſt of the Apoſtles, *viz.* about 150 years, and an interval which had much fewer Chriſtian writers.

Beſides, nothing is ſaid by any writer before Cyprian, from which it can be inferred that the cuſtom of giving the Euchariſt to children was not in uſe, and the prevailing opinions and prejudices mentioned before, ſome of which may be traced up to Ignatius, who were cotemporary with the Apoſtles, were ſuch as are almoſt alone ſufficient to lead us to infer the practice. In circumſtances

cumſtances like theſe, the ſilence of remote antiquity is certainly a ſtrong argument in favour of the univerſal prevalence of a cuſtom.

Now when infant communion appears to have been the conſtant practice among the earlieſt of the primitive Chriſtians, and continued, without variation, for many centuries, in ages abounding with writers, and full of controverſy, can it be ſuppoſed that it was not in uſe even in the time of the Apoſtles; and that we ſhould not have been able to trace the riſe and progreſs of it, if it had been introduced after their time; eſpecially conſidering how much eaſier it is to do this with reſpect to a *practice*, than with reſpect to an *opinion*.

Theſe conſiderations lead us not to expect to find much ſaid concerning infant communion by the Apoſtles, and other writers of the New Teſtament, there having been no controverſy about it, to give them an opportunity of men-

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tioning it, However, there are not wanting circumſtances, which ſhew that, though the writers of the New Teſtament do not expreſly mention it, yet that they *had a view to it* in their writings.

The Apoſtle Paul ſeems to have referred to the cuſtom of giving the Euchariſt to children in 1 *Cor.* vii, 14. *for the unbelieving huſband is ſanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is ſanctified by the huſband. Elſe were your children unclean, but now are they holy.* For what could the Apoſtle, or any Jew, mean by children being *holy*, or *clean*, but what had always been underſtood by that term in the Jewiſh law, where it implies a right to full communion in public worſhip. A perſon *unclean*, or *unholy* (for the terms are of the ſame import) was excluded from the temple ſervice, but when he was *cleanſed*, or *made holy*, he recovered his former privilege. From theſe conſiderations I think we may pretty reaſonably conclude,

that

that the Apoſtle, in this place, meant to determine that the children of but one Chriſtian parent, were, in this ſenſe, *holy*, or had a right to Chriſtian communion, by which, at that time, and many ages afterwards, was always meant both baptiſm and the Lord's Supper.

Farther, the Apoſtle Paul compares *communion with an idol*, or in idol worſhip, *to communion with Chriſt*, and ſhews that they are utterly inconſiſtent with one another. Now it is pretty evident that children partook of feaſts in honour of idols.

Again, when the Corinthians ſo far miſtook the nature of the Lord's Supper, that they made a *common meal* of it, on which occaſion ſome were hungry, and others drunken, that is, drank very liberally, Dr. Pierce thinks it can hardly be ſuppoſed, but that their whole families were preſent; and yet, though the Apoſtle, no doubt, reproves them for every thing that was *diſorderly* in their conduct upon this occaſion, he ſays nothing

thing of their being guilty of any impropriety in this reſpect.

I do not lay much ſtreſs upon our Saviour's invitation to little children, to *come unto him*, or his adding, *for of ſuch is the kingdom of heaven*, becauſe it is probable that his principal meaning was, that ſuch innocence as their's would qualify grown up perſons to be the proper ſubjects of his kingdom: yet they may alſo intimate, that of ſuch would his *viſible church* on earth conſiſt.

It is true that theſe paſſages contain no more than *alluſions* to the cuſtom of giving the Euchariſt to children, and that theſe alluſions were, as it were, *accidental*; but then this very circumſtance is an argument in favour of the practice being univerſally received and eſtabliſhed when thoſe writings were compoſed, ſo that there was no occaſion to ſpeak of it in any other manner, if at all. Had there not been ſo much as even an alluſion to this cuſtom in the New Teſta-

ment,

ment, yet as we find it to have been univerſally practiſed ſo near to the times of the Apoſtles, that the introduction of it afterwards is in the higheſt degree improbable, we have ſufficient authority to aſcribe it to them. And if the practice and authority of the Apoſtles have any weight with us, it will be the ſame thing whether we be certified of their practice by the medium of their own writings, or by any other *unqueſtionable evidence*.

The Apoſtles themſelves make no mention of their meeting conſtantly for public worſhip on the firſt day of the week; yet almoſt all the chriſtian world juſtly conſiders this practice as apoſtolical; becauſe they find that it was, without any controverſy, and univerſally, received among chriſtians in early times. Now the evidence of infant communion being an apoſtolical practice, is exactly ſimilar to that by which we infer that meeting for public worſhip on the firſt day of the week is ſo.

You

You will ſay, if infant communion was univerſally the antient practice in the chriſtian church, how came it to be laid aſide? This queſtion I ſhall now endeavour to anſwer, by giving, as I propoſed to do, in the ſecond place, the hiſtory of this cuſtom.

I own that our preſent practice in this reſpect is ſo very different from the antient apoſtolical one, that a ſtranger might well wonder how the one could ariſe from the other. But would he not wonder more, how, in this ſame ordinance, the cup came to be denied to the laity, when it is univerſally confeſſed, that all antient churches communicated in both kinds. In fact, both theſe new cuſtoms had their riſe from the ſame cauſe; and, what is very remarkable, took place about the ſame time, and not till the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation was fully eſtabliſhed, which was about the twelfth century.

It is well known that a ſuperſtitious reverence for the euchariſtical elements took place in the chriſtian church very early. Several hints that I have dropped may ſatisfy you with reſpect to this. Now, when ſuch a wonderful efficacy was aſcribed to the conſecrated bread and wine, and eſpecially when chriſtians began to conſider them as the real body and blood of Chriſt, it is not to be wondered at, that every method that could be deviſed was made uſe of, in order to prevent any *waſte*, or *abuſe* of them.

The firſt regulation that I have met with, concerning infants, that had this aſpect, was an order, which ſome refer to the ſeventh, and others to the eleventh century, that infants ſhould not, without the utmoſt neceſſity, have any food, or even ſuck, after they were baptized, before they received the Lord's Supper.

Afterwards, in the twelfth century, when pope Paſchal forbad the cuſtom of

giving the bread dipped in the wine (which had likewiſe been introduced in order to prevent any waſte of the elements) he ordered that young children, who could not ſwallow the bread, and alſo ſick perſons, ſhould receive the wine only.

Alſo, to prevent the profanation of the elements, it became the cuſtom for the prieſt to dip his finger only in the wine, and give it to the child to ſuck. But ſtill all the wine not being ſuppoſed to go down the child's throat, it was uſual, in many places, to give children *unconſecrated wine*, a cuſtom which continued in uſe in the church of Dort till the reformation.

At length, however, it being imagined that there was leſs danger of waſte in eating the bread made into the ſhape of a ſmall round *wafer*, than in drinking the wine, and the bread being ſuppoſed to repreſent the whole body of Chriſt, including the blood, the church of Rome ordained,

ordained, that all communion ſhould be in one kind only. Upon this, as the children had been before deprived of the bread, the taking away of the wine excluded them from the communion of chriſtians altogether. Indeed, in many places, they were only, at that time, deprived of the mere ſhadow of it, having received unconſecrated wine.

It is remarkable, however, that infant communion was not abſolutely forbidden in the church of Rome, by an expreſs and formal determination of any council, till the fifteenth century, at the council of Baſil, ſome time after they had, in the council of Conſtance, in 1415, decreed, that the laity ſhould receive the communion in one kind only. Still, however, even the council of Trent, in 1545, far from denying the antiquity and authority of the practice, ventured to anathematize only thoſe who thought infant communion neceſſary to ſalvation.

It is very remarkable, and certainly very much in favour of my argument, that, in all chriſtian churches that have never been infected with the Romiſh ſuperſtition, and ſubject to the Papal authority, the right of infants to chriſtian communion was never invaded. Infant communion is to this day the practice of the Greek churches, of the Ruſſians, the Armenians, the Maronites, the Copts, the Aſſyrians, and probably all other oriental churches; and it was alſo the practice of the Bohemians, who kept themſelves free from the Papal authority till very near the reformation; and, in a petition, which the Bohemian biſhops preſented to the council of Baſil, in 1438, they pleaded very earneſtly to be allowed to continue this their antient cuſtom. For, in the ſixth article they thus expreſs themſelves:

" Likewiſe we intreat, that, in con-
" ſideration of the great affection of our
" people, you would grant us the li-
" berty we deſire, of giving children
" the

" the holy euchariſt. For, if that cuſ-
" tom ſhould be laid aſide, which this
" kingdom, upon pious conſiderations,
" and being moved thereto by the wri-
" tings and example of great and holy
" doctors, has received as catholic, and
" has accordingly uſed, theſe many
" years, a great and intolerable ſcandal
" will be given to the people: nay,
" their minds will be ſo diſturbed there-
" by, that they will become implaca-
" ble." But though this council admit-
ted of their receiving the communion in
both kinds, they would not grant this
earneſt and reaſonable requeſt.

Having produced theſe arguments,
which induce me to conclude, that the
practice of giving the euchariſt to chil-
dren is truly primitive and apoſtolical,
and having ſhewn how the preſent prac-
tice aroſe in ~~in~~ its place, I proceed, in
the third place, to point out the *advan-
tages* which I apprehend might ariſe
from our returning to the antient cuſ-
tom.

But

But, previous to this, I would take the liberty to obſerve, that ſince the adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper is an act of public worſhip, the ends of the inſtitution will be anſwered, if children be brought to communion as ſoon as it is found convenient for them to attend other parts of public worſhip. Beſides, though baptiſm ſhould always be adminiſtered in public, ſtill there ſeems to be a reaſon why it ſhould not be deemed neceſſary for children to receive the Lord's Supper till they be properly capable of the external actions of eating and drinking. With reſpect to baptiſm the caſe is naturally different. For, this rite being only a waſhing with water, and performed by another, children are capable of being the ſubjects of it at any time. And it will equally ſecure their continuing to attend this ordinance, if they be accuſtomed to it from the time that they are brought to attend public worſhip, as if they had been uſed to it from their infancy. I am far, however, from thinking there is any impropriety

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in bringing even the youngeſt children to the Lord's Supper, in token of their being members of the ſame body, and intitled to the ſame privileges with ourſelves.

Alſo, before I proceed to enumerate the advantages that may probably attend the revival of this primitive cuſtom, I ſhall farther premiſe, that no *objection* can be made to this cuſtom, but what may, with equal force, be made to the cuſtom of baptizing infants, to the circumciſion of children, admitting them to the Jewiſh paſſover, or bringing them to the public worſhip of chriſtians.

The Lord's Supper was inſtituted *in remembrance of Chriſt*, and children, it may be ſaid, cannot remember him. But the paſſover alſo was inſtituted in commemoration of the deliverance of the children of Iſrael from the Egyptian bondage, and children could not be made to underſtand any thing about the matter.

Alſo

Alſo, our Saviour's commiſſion to *baptize all nations*, follows the injunction to *teach*, or *diſciple* them, but infants cannot be taught any thing. In all theſe caſes, it is to be underſtood, that theſe actions are to be done as ſoon as perſons are capable of them, and that children are to be taught, and reminded of them, as ſoon as poſſible.

The apoſtle alſo bids the Corinthians *examine themſelves*, and *ſo receive the Lord's Supper*; but this was only a caution to them to conſider that they were not going to a common entertainment, with which they had before confounded this religious rite; and, in its own nature, belonged to the adult. He does not ſay, that none ſhould attend, but thoſe who could examine themſelves.

Laſtly, I would deſire thoſe perſons who are ſtartled at the *novelty*, as it appears to them, of the practice I would recommend, to conſider more particularly that the thing is pre-

preciſely of the ſame nature with a practice, which is, I believe, univerſal among chriſtians, and which the generality of ſerious perſons conſider as a duty of indiſpenſable obligation. I mean that of bringing children to public worſhip. Is not this done long before it can be ſuppoſed that they are capable of underſtanding the nature of the ſeveral ſervices which are performed in our churches, much leſs of properly joining, and bearing their part in them? But this offends no body, becauſe it is eaſily acknowledged, that by eſtabliſhing an *early habit* of attending public worſhip, and, at the ſame time, impreſſing the minds of children with a notion of its obligation and importance, their future attendance is ſecured, and by this means their *rational attendance*, and their *voluntary attachment* to it, are accelerated. Now, I will venture to ſay, that the ſame advantages muſt neceſſarily ariſe from children being as early brought to the Lord's Supper, and that I cannot help being of opinion, that no body would have

thought of making any more objection to the one than to the other, if this ſimple inſtitution had not been ſo groſsly abuſed as it has been in the chriſtian world; in conſequence of which, it is ſo far from appearing to be, what it really is, a moſt agreeable and chearful rite, that the greateſt gloom and horror has been thrown about it, and chriſtians have been afraid to communicate. But it is to be hoped that, in time, all the remains of the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation will be worn out with us, that chriſtianity, with all that belongs to it, will appear infinitely more amiable and inviting, and that, among other happy conſequences, the table of the Lord will be crouded with chearful and welcome gueſts.

It may be added, that children are generally, and very properly made to ſay their prayers, and learn their catechiſm, when they can repeat them no otherwiſe than by rote, without underſtanding any thing about them; becauſe,

cauſe, by this means, a future, though no preſent advantage is ſecured to them.

Were this antient cuſtom of admitting children to the Lord's Supper revived, I cannot help thinking, that our children, and poſterity in general, would derive conſiderable advantages from it.

In the firſt place, our children would, by this means, become more the objects of attention, both to their parents, and the governors of churches, and we ſhould, of courſe, be leſs likely to neglect their chriſtian education. They themſelves alſo would be more apt to inquire concerning the reaſons of what themſelves conſtantly did, and thus furniſh an eaſier handle for their religious inſtruction.

Moſes takes particular notice of the effect which the celebration of the paſſover, in which the children of every family bore a part, would have upon them, and of the opportunity which it gave the parents of inſtructing them

concerning the reaſon of it; and the ſame muſt neceſſarily be the caſe with our children, reſpecting the ſimilar inſtitution of the Lord's Supper. Exod. xii. 26. *And it ſhall come to paſs, when your children ſhall ſay unto you, What mean ye by this ſervice; that ye ſhall ſay, It is the ſervice of the Lord's Paſſover, who paſſed over the houſes of the children of Iſrael in Egypt, when he ſmote the Egyptians, and delivered our houſes.* In like manner, our children, were they preſent at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and bore a part in it themſelves, would be excited to give particular attention to it, and inquire concerning the reaſon of it. Whereas, with us, children ſeldom ſee or know any thing of the matter. Their being preſent at the celebration, without partaking of it themſelves, would not intereſt them near ſo much, and would likewiſe tend to give them improper and ſuperſtitious ideas of the ſervice.

Secondly,

Secondly; the principal advantage that might be expected from it, is that, by this means, young perſons would probably be more firmly eſtabliſhed in the belief of chriſtianity. Having been, from their infancy, conſtantly accuſtomed to bear their part in all the rites of it, they would be more firmly attached to it, and leſs eaſily deſert it. This great advantage might, with ſtill more probability, be expected, if the antient cuſtom of *communicating every Lord's day* were likewiſe reſtored; and it was only through a ſuperſtitious reverence for this ordinance, that the frequent celebration of it came to be abandoned. With us, Diſſenters, the common people have too little *to do*, relating to their great profeſſion as chriſtians; and conſequently they give but little attention to it; and when we ſo ſenſibly labour under the evils of this want of proper attention to the profeſſion of chriſtianity, it ſurely becomes us to have recourſe to every proper and reaſonable method to revive it.

Our

Our children, and generally young perſons under twenty years of age, including that period in which their moſt important attachments and habits are formed, have little connection with chriſtian churches. In all this part of their life they are mere *hearers*, and *bearing their part* in nothing that paſſes, they have little to attach them to chriſtian worſhip, and conſequently they have *too little to break through* when they quit the profeſſion of chriſtianity altogether. Indeed, they have nothing to diſtinguiſh them from unbelievers, for many of theſe chuſe to attend public worſhip.

The ſource of the evils which ariſe from the neglect of infant communion with us is, that, as there is no fixed time for the commencement of the practice, perſons keep putting it off from time to time, till they neglect it intirely. Alſo, in the mean time, their minds are expoſed to the influences of ſuperſtition, which

which repreſents this ſervice as ſomething peculiarly ſolemn and hazardous. All theſe evils, as it appears to me, may be effectually prevented, by training up children, in this, as well as in every other reſpect, in the way in which we would have them to go. The great obſtacle which now lies in the way of this part of their duty, will then be removed; and when the practice of every thing *external* belonging to chriſtianity is become habitual, the obligation to what is *internal* will be more conſtantly, and more ſenſibly felt.

At preſent, the bulk of profeſſing chriſtians think they can be excuſed from the ſtrongeſt part of the obligation to act as becomes that profeſſion, by declining the celebration of the Lord's Supper; and to evade this obligation (in which they miſerably deceive themſelves) they live and die refuſing to comply with an expreſs command of Chriſt. Were the practice of communicating very early once eſtabliſhed, this wretched ſubterfuge would be for ever removed.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, the revival of the practice of infant communion might be a means of reviving an uſeful *church diſcipline*, which is altogether loſt among us, and of the want of which many wiſe and good men complain. For if this practice were eſtabliſhed, there would be a neceſſity for the government of churches, becauſe there would be ſomething for governors to do. Both the external decorum of chriſtian churches, and the proper deportment of the members of them would, of courſe, engage more attention. As the whole of every ſociety would be admitted to communion, there would be an evident neceſſity for admoniſhing and reproving the vicious, for excommunicating the unworthy and refractory, and for re-admitting the penitent.

This buſineſs would give to chriſtian churches *an external form and ſubſtance*, without which the *life and ſoul* cannot be expected to be found in vigour. The conduct of them would then more intereſt

intereſt all their members, and their attachment to their reſpective churches, and alſo to the religion which is the object of them, would be greatly ſtrengthened. In this manner a zeal for chriſtianity might revive, and perhaps be equal to what it was in the primitive times, when the diſcipline of churches, we know, was remarkably ſtrict.

That ſomething is wanting to be done for this purpoſe is moſt evident. The lukewarmneſs of chriſtians, eſpecially as *members of one body*, and united by common ties, is too apparent to be overlooked by any perſon. There is no proper *fellowſhip* among us. We feel no obligation *to watch over one another*. We do not conſider the good behaviour of a member of the ſame ſociety to be an honour to us, or their miſbehaviour a reproach, and till our union be ſuch, as that this ſhall be more ſenſibly felt, till we have that perfect *ſympathy* which will diſpoſe us *to rejoice with all that*

 rejoice,

rejoice, and weep with all that weep, we ſhall have no ſufficient motive to *mind not every man his own things only, but every man alſo the things of others*; and we ſhall conſequently be deficient in that *brotherly love, which is the fulfilling of the law*, and without which there can be no lively and active principle of *love to God* our common parent. Moreover, when the life and ſoul of our aſſemblies is gone, is it to be wondered at that the body ſhould decay and die.

Let us then, my brethren, apply ourſelves in earneſt to the revival of the *things that remain, and are ready to die* among us. Among other methods, let me recommend the practice of admitting our children to the Lord's Supper, as it promiſes to be of ſome uſe for this good purpoſe, eſpecially as it has the ſanction of primitive antiquity, and of apoſtolical, and conſequently of divine authority.

FINIS.

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